

EVIDENCES
OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION;
Briefly and plainly stated.

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SECTION IV.

THE SUBJECT CONTINUED.

*The excellency and singular nature of
Christianity, a proof of its truth.*

IT was hinted, that the other evidences of our religion may be greatly confirmed by the consideration of its singular nature, and by the peculiar excellency of the knowledge we derive from it. For, if it shall be found to have made its way in the world, in opposition to human power, and by

more than human means ; if its excellency be such as to transcend the noblest efforts of human wisdom ; and if in its purity and tendency it be altogether worthy of God ; we must, I think, assign it a divine original.

SOME things pertaining to this part of the subject have been mentioned already. But, in a disquisition of this sort, in which the evidence hangs so closely together, that scarce any one part of it can be treated separate from the rest, a few repetitions will be pardoned, because it is not easy to avoid them.

NEVER was there on earth any other person of so extraordinary a character

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Character

singular

or unique

as the Founder of our religion. In him we uniformly see a mildness, dignity, and composure, and a perfection of wisdom and of goodness, that plainly point him out as a superior being. But his superiority was all in his own divine mind. He had none of those outward advantages that have distinguished all other lawgivers. He had no influence in the state ; he had no wealth ; he aimed at no worldly power. He was the son of a carpenter's wife, and he was himself a carpenter. So poor were his reputed parents, that at the time of his birth his mother could obtain no better lodging than a stable ; and so poor was he himself, that he often had no lodging at all. That he had no advantages of education, we may infer from

from the surprise expressed by his neighbours on hearing him speak in the synagogue : ‘ Whence hath this man
‘ these things ? What wisdom is this
‘ which is given him ? Is not this the
‘ carpenter, the son of Mary ? Are not
‘ his brethren and sisters with us ?’ This point, however, we need not insist on ; as from no education, that his own or any other country could have afforded, was it possible for him to derive that supernatural wisdom and power, that sanctity of life, and that purity of doctrine, which distinguish him from all other human beings. His first adherents were a few fishermen ; for whom he was so far from making any provision, that, when he sent them out to preach repentance and heal diseases, they
were,

were, by his desire, furnished with nothing, but one coat, a pair of sandals, and a staff. He went about, in great humility and meekness, doing good, teaching wisdom, and glorifying God, for the space of about three years after the commencement of his ministry; and then, as he himself had foreseen and foretold, he was publicly crucified.—This is the man, who at this day gives law to a great part of the world, and to all the most enlightened nations. This is the man, who has been the author of virtue and happiness to millions and millions of the human race. And this is he, whom the wisest and best men that ever lived have revered as a divine person, and gloried in as the deliverer and saviour of mankind.

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IN all this is there nothing extraordinary, nothing that seems to require the operation of more than human wisdom, and more than human power? We have heard of great events proceeding from small causes ; but in general we can trace the connection between them, and account for it from the common principles that regulate human affairs. But here, supposing Jesus to have been nothing more than a mere man, and no other than human means to have been employed in promulgating and supporting his religion ; the cause and the effect are utterly inadequate, and the influence of the one upon the other perfectly unintelligible.

THIS

IS TRUE.

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THIS religion, taught at first by a few obscure, unlettered, and persecuted men, most of whom were put to death for no other reason but because they taught it, was in a very short time spread over part of Asia, and a great part of Europe; notwithstanding the bloody persecutions which it had to encounter, from Nero to Dioclesian. Think of the power engaged to bear it down, and that by which it was to be supported; and can there be any doubt, that truth, and miracles, and the protection of heaven, must have been on its side? Was any other religion ever introduced in this manner? The Mahometan was brought in by a commander at the head of a victorious army, and in a part of the world which has

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has never in any age been distinguished for liberty or literature : nay, to this day, slavery and ignorance are the inseparable attendants of the religion of Mahomet. The Jewish was established in one small nation only, and had for its apparent author the greatest man of that nation, and met there with no considerable opponent ; which, by the by, considering its burdensome ceremonies, could hardly have happened, and we are sure did not happen, without the aid of miracles. The pagan religions were a sort of political institutions, adapted to the ignorance and credulity of those who received them ; so that they had no opposition either to suffer or to fear : nor indeed do they seem to have been considered

as

as of moment enough to excite serious controversy, far less to kindle persecution. No man ever laid down his life for the honour of Jupiter, Neptune, or Apollo: but how many thousands have sealed their Christian testimony with their blood!

ANOTHER singularity in our religion is, that it has been more spoken against than any other. Every part of its evidence has been repeatedly examined, objected to, and vindicated. Equally friendly to freedom and true philosophy, wherever it has existed in any tolerable purity, it has raised the attention of inquisitive men; the greatest philosophers that ever lived have inquired into it, and found it true; and

the utmost acuteness of sophistry has been employed to prove it false. What is the consequence of all this? It is, that the evidence of our faith remains at this day as clear and complete, as it has been in any age since that of the apostles and their immediate successors. Light minds, from inattention or ignorance; profligate minds, from a dislike to its purity; and vain minds, out of ostentation, and from the love of singularity, may have apostatised from it: but the Christian who has made it his study, and knows the reason of the faith that is in him, will not admit, that any argument has ever been brought against it, which has not been refuted. Can this be said of any other religion, or of any system
of

of unchristian opinions, that ever was heard of? Nay, I trust there are, and I believe it will not be doubted that there are, many thousands of learned and rational Christians, who, if they were called to so severe a trial, would cheerfully lay down their lives for the honour of God and their Redeemer. Is the zeal and sincerity of the unbeliever equally to be depended on? Would any disciple of Bolingbroke, Hume, or Voltaire, suffer martyrdom in the cause of his master?

THESE singularities in the fate and fortunes of Christianity seem to show, that it could not have either been so generally known, or so long existed, if it had not been supported by means
more

more than human. There are in it other singularities, which prove, that it deserved to be so supported, and that it could not have been the work of mere human wisdom.

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 The evidence arising from these has been called its Internal Evidence; and is, in the opinion of some learned men, so great, that scarce any other is necessary to prove our religion to be from heaven.

(11)
 For first, the morality of the gospel gives it an infinite superiority over all systems of doctrine that ever were devised by man. Were our lives and opinions to be regulated as it prescribes, nothing would be wanting to make us happy:

Superior to all other
 in its moral

happy : there would be no injustice, no impiety, no disorderly passions ; harmony and love would universally prevail ; every man, content with his lot, resigned to the divine will, and fully persuaded that a happy eternity is before him, would pass his days in tranquility and joy, to which neither anxiety, nor pain, nor even the fear of death, could ever give any interruption. The best systems of pagan ethics are very imperfect, and not free from absurdity ; and in them are recommended modes of thinking unsuitable to human nature, and modes of conduct which, though they might have been useful in a political view, did not tend to virtue and happiness universal. But of all our Lord's institutions

tions the end and aim is, to promote the happiness, by promoting the virtue, of all mankind.

AND secondly ; his peculiar doctrines are not like any thing of human contrivance. ' Never man spake like this ' man.' One of the first names given to that dispensation of things which he came to introduce, was *the kingdom*, or the reign, of *heaven*. It was justly so called ; being thus distinguished, not only from the religion of Moses, the sanctions whereof related to the present life, but also from every human scheme of moral, political, or ecclesiastical legislation.

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THE views of the heathen moralist extended not beyond this world ; those of the Christian are fixed on that which is to come. The former was concerned for his own country only or chiefly ; the latter takes concern in the happiness of all men, of all nations, conditions, and capacities. A few, and but a few, of the antient philosophers, spoke of a future state of retribution as a thing desirable and not improbable : revelation speaks of it as certain ; and of the present life as a state of trial, wherein virtue or holiness is necessary, not only to entitle us to that salvation which, through the mercy of God and the merits of his Son, Christians are taught to look for, but also to prepare us, by habits of piety and benevolence,
for

for a reward, which none but the pure in heart can receive, or could relish.

THE duties of piety, as far as the heart is concerned, were not much attended to by the heathen lawgiver. Cicero coldly ranks them with the social virtues, and says very little about them. The sacrifices were mere ceremony. And what the Stoicks taught of resignation to the will of heaven, or to the decrees of fate, was so repugnant to some of their other tenets, that little good could be expected from it. But of every Christian virtue piety is an essential part. The love and the fear of God must every moment prevail in the heart of a follower of Jesus; and whether he eat or drink, or whatever he do,
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it must all be to the glory of the Creator. How different this from the philosophy of Greece and Rome !

IN a word, the heathen morality, *even in its best form*, that is, as two or three of their best philosophers taught it, amounts to little more than this : Be useful to yourselves, your friends, and your country ; so shall ye be respectable while ye live, and honoured when ye die ; and it is to be hoped ye may receive reward in another life. The language of the Christian lawgiver is different. The world is not worthy of the ambition of an immortal being. Its honours and pleasures have a tendency to debase the mind, and disqualify it for future happiness. Set there-

fore your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth. Let it be your supreme desire to obtain God's favour : and, by a course of discipline, begun here and to be completed hereafter, prepare yourselves for a re-admission into that rank which was forfeited by the fall, and for again being but a little lower than the angels, and crowned with glory and honour everlasting.

WHAT an idea is here ! Is there any thing like this in Xenophon or Plato, in Cicero, Seneca, or Epictetus ? ' Whence had this man these things ? What wisdom is this that was given him ? ' Surely man gave it not ; for man had it not to give. This is an
idea,

idea, which never occurred to human imagination, till it was taught by a poor carpenter of Galilee, and by a few fishermen who followed him. Yet to the native dignity, and undeniable degeneracy, of human nature, no other moral theory was ever so well adapted ; and no other has so direct a tendency to promote the glory of God, and the real good of mankind. Is it possible to explain this upon the principles that usually regulate human affairs ? Is it possible for us to believe, that teachers so holy, so benevolent, and so pious, so superiour to the world, and so thoroughly disengaged from its allurements, were not taught of God ? As easy almost it is to believe, that this world was not made by him. Is it possible

possible for us to imagine, that persons of such a character could have employed their lives in the promulgation of a lie, and willingly encountered persecution and death, in support of it? As well may we imagine, that an evil tree brings forth good fruit, and that men gather grapes from thorns, and figs from thistles.

BUT had not the prophets prophesied of Christ and his gospel, and its character and tendency? And if so, how can it be said, that no such thing had ever before occurred to human imagination?—It is true, that the prophets had prophesied these things; but, though they *foretold*, it is not certain that they *foresaw* them. On the contrary,

contrary, there is reason to think, that, if they had distinctly understood what they predicted, they would have expressed it in plainer and less figurative language; or at least that they would have left traditions behind them, which, in after times, among people so tenacious of tradition as the Jews were, might have served as a key to those sacred writings. It was enough for the prophets to know that they had authority to speak what they spoke, or to commit to writing what the Spirit suggested: to explain it to the people, or to inquire themselves into the meaning of it, was probably no part of their business. And it must be as easy for divine power to make prophets foretell without foresight, as to

to enable them both to foretel and to foresee.

AFTER all, it must be owned, that this argument for Christianity, drawn from the peculiar excellency of its doctrines, cannot appear equally striking to all men. They only will see it in its full lustre, who are conversant in Holy Writ, and have a pretty distinct view of the whole extent of Christian theology ; whereof I cannot, in so small a tract as this, propose to give even an abridgement. To Mr Jenyns's *View of the internal evidence of Christianity*, in which are many ingenious observations, though all are not unexceptionable, I beg leave to refer the reader ; and

and shall conclude this part of my subject with a remark or two.

WHAT an elevation must it give to our pious affections, to contemplate the Supreme Being and his Providence, as revealed to us in Scripture ! We are there taught, that man was created in the image of God, innocent and happy : and that he had no sooner fallen into sin, than his Creator, instead of abandoning him, and his offspring, to the natural consequences of his disobedience, and of their hereditary depravity, was pleased to begin a wonderful dispensation of grace, in order to rescue from perdition, and raise again to happiness, as many as should acquiesce in the terms of the offered salvation,

salvation, and regulate their lives accordingly.

By the sacred books that contain the history of this dispensation we are further taught, that God is a spirit, unchangeable, and eternal, universally present, and absolutely perfect ; that it is our duty to fear him, as a being of consummate purity and inflexible justice, and to love him as the father of mercies, and the God of all consolation ; to trust in him as the friend, the comforter, and the almighty guardian of all who believe and obey him ; to rejoice in him as the best of beings, and adore him as the greatest :—we are taught, that he will make allowance for the frailties of our nature, and
pardon

pardon the sins of those who repent :—
and, that we may see, in the strongest
light, his peculiar benignity to the hu-
man race, we are taught, that he gave
his only Son as our ransom and deliv-
erer ; and we are not only permitted,
but commanded, to pray to him, and
address him as OUR FATHER :—we
are taught, moreover, that the evils in-
cident to this state of trial are permit-
ted by him, in order to exercise our
virtue, and so prepare us for a future
state of never-ending felicity ; and that
these momentary afflictions are pledges
of his paternal love, and shall, if we
receive them as such, and venerate
them accordingly, work out for us
' an exceeding great and eternal weight
' of glory.' If these hopes and these

sentiments contribute more to our happiness, and to the purification of our nature, than any thing else in the world can do, surely that religion, to which alone we owe these sentiments and hopes, must be the greatest blessing that ever was conferred on the posterity of Adam.

AND is it, after all, but a mere human contrivance ; the invention of mean and illiterate men, who lived, and who died, in the voluntary promulgation of falsehood ? To what other human artifice does this bear any resemblance ? Does not this religion as plainly prove itself to be the work of a wise and gracious God, as the absurdity of the pagan superstitions proves them

them to have been the work of weak and wretched men ?

To the great end of improving, renewing, and perfecting our whole nature, no invention of man could ever have been adapted ; that being an idea, which could never have occurred to mere human wisdom, and which, if it had occurred, would have been deemed an impossibility. But to this great end, so worthy of God, and so honourable to man, our religion is adapted in such a way, as fills the humble and considerate mind with wonder and adoration ; and would indeed raise inexpressible astonishment, if it had not been familiar to us from our infancy.

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CHRISTIANITY proposes to our imitation the highest examples of benevolence, purity, and piety. It shows, that all our actions, purposes, and thoughts, are to us of infinite importance ; their consequences being nothing less than happiness or misery in the life to come : and thus it operates most powerfully on our self-love. By teaching, that all mankind are brethren ; by commanding us to love our neighbour as ourselves ; and by declaring every man our neighbour to whom we have it in our power to do good ; it improves benevolence to the highest pitch. By prohibiting revenge, malice, pride, vanity, envy, sensuality, and covetousness ; and by requiring us to forgive, to pray for, and to bless

our

our enemies, and to do to others as we would that they should do to us, it lays a restraint on every malevolent and turbulent passion ; and reduces the whole of social virtue to two or three precepts ; so brief, that they cannot be forgotten ; so plain, that they cannot be misunderstood ; so reasonable, that no man of sense controverts them ; and so well suited to human nature and human affairs, that every candid mind may easily, and on all occasions, apply them to practice.

CHRISTIANITY recommends the strictest self-attention, by this awful consideration, that God is continually present with us, knows what we think, as well as what we do, and will judge the
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the world in righteousness, and render unto every man according to his works. It makes us consider conscience, as his voice and law within us ; purity of heart, as that which alone can qualify us for the enjoyment of future reward ; and mutual love, or charity, as that without which all other virtues and accomplishments are of no value : and, by a view of things peculiarly striking, it causes vice to appear a most pernicious and abominable thing, which cannot escape punishment. Purity of heart it still further recommends, by teaching this wonderful doctrine ; that even the bodies of good men shall at last, in a glorified state, be re-united to their souls, and made, as that of Adam originally was, immortal ; and that,

that, therefore, in this life of general probation, they must be kept free from dishonour, and, instead of ministering to those sensualityies that debase our nature, be employed as instruments in doing good.

IN a word, Christianity, as Bishop Taylor well observes, ‘ is a doctrine, ‘ in which nothing is superfluous or ‘ burdensome ; and in which there is ‘ nothing wanting, which can procure ‘ happiness to mankind, or by which ‘ God can be glorified. And if,’ continues he, ‘ wisdom, and mercy, and ‘ justice, and simplicity, and holiness, ‘ and purity, and meekness, and contentedness, and charity, be images of ‘ God, and rays of divinity, then that ‘ doctrine,

‘ doctrine, in which all these shine so
 ‘ gloriously, and in which nothing else
 ‘ is ingredient, must needs be from
 ‘ God *.’

I CONCLUDE the chapter in the following words of the same great author.

‘ If the holy Jesus had come into the
 ‘ world with less splendour of power
 ‘ and mighty demonstrations, yet the
 ‘ excellency of what he taught makes
 ‘ him alone fit to be the master of the
 ‘ world.’

* Moral Demonstration of the Truth of the Christian Religion.

C H A P.

C H A P. III.

OBJECTIONS ANSWERED.

THE advocate for Christianity has nothing to do with the peculiar tenets of Luther, Calvin, or Bellarmine, or with any other system which is liable to be tinged with human infirmity: his business is, to vindicate 'the truth as it is in Jesus.' I do not therefore think myself concerned to answer any objection of those writers,

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who mistake the corruptions of Christianity for Christianity itself. They who persecute or hate or even judge uncharitably of others, act in direct opposition to the plainest, and indeed to the essential, doctrines of the gospel : and every church that encourages cruelty, injustice, or uncharitableness, in any degree, is in the same degree unchristian.

BUT why should Christianity be liable to corruption ? Would not the power and goodness of God have appeared in it more conspicuously, if he had made it insusceptible of debasement or change ? Totally to debase or alter it, is indeed impossible, as long as the sacred records remain ; to
which

which all sects of Christians appeal as their standard of faith, and which their mutual jealousy of each other will never suffer to be materially corrupted. But every thing must be liable to debasement, which is entrusted to a creature so frail and fallible as man. What is more debased, or more perverted, than health and speech? Yet it will not be said, that the divine goodness and power would have appeared more conspicuously in us, if we had all been sickly and dumb. In every state of moral probation, error must be possible, and evil must exist.

BUT, beside the general principle of debasement arising from the frailty of our nature, other causes of a more parti-

particular, and indeed of an extraordinary kind, co-operated, soon after the apostolick age, in corrupting the Christian religion. Was it possible, that its gentle influence could check the progress of that ruin, into which the enormous mass of the Roman power was then rushing headlong ; or prevent the confusion, the crimes, and the universal degeneracy of manners, which always attend the fall of empire, and did so remarkably distinguish that of the Roman ? And, amidst the savage uproar of the conquering invaders from the north, was it possible, that the soft accents of the gospel of peace could be heard with efficacy, or heard at all ? Then followed that long night of

of intellectual darkness, threatening the final extinction of every ray of knowledge that had hitherto enlightened the sons of men. And from this chaos of ignorance was it possible to exclude the fiends of superstition, or those other sanguinary demons of rapacity and cruelty, which never fail to haunt the uncultivated mind? It cannot be matter of surprise, that, in these circumstances, a religion founded in peace, in right reason, and in the purest morality, should first be neglected, then misunderstood, and afterwards grossly corrupted; and that, from being made subservient to the purposes of human, and often of barbarous policy, it should, in its corrupted state, contract many stains of barbarism, and much of the pride

pride and vanity and other follies of human nature.

IN fact, in the course of a few centuries, Christianity had lost its beauty and purifying virtue, and, like a stream choaked with rubbish, if the reader will pardon the figure, presented an image of danger and desolation, rather than of utility and comfort. But, though the waters were polluted, the fountain was not dried up. And, by the gradual operation of causes, some more and others less observable, when obstructions began at last to give way, and the channel to open, this river of life again broke forth in a copious and sprightly current ; which, though not yet every where free from restraint nor
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in any nation restored to its primitive purity, will in time, it is hoped, diffuse itself by the divine blessing into all lands, and, in its progress,

Work itself clear, and, as it runs, refine ;
Till by degrees the floating mirror shine,
Reflect the flowers that on its border blow,
And heaven's own light in its fair bosom
show.

For, to drop the allegory, whatever other changes may happen, we have nothing now to apprehend similar to the Gothic invasions, or to that extinction of literature which attended and followed them. As the world is now constituted, learning and liberal inquiry are likely to prevail in it more and more. And, as these prevail, ignorance

rance and tyranny, sophistry and superstition, which have hitherto been the most deadly enemies of both Christian faith and true philosophy, will in the same proportion lose their influence. But to return.

To confute all the cavils of unbelief, would be endless ; and to enter very minutely into the detail of them, would extend this little book to a size, which might discourage from reading it those for whom it is intended. I confine myself, therefore, to those objections chiefly which I have heard in conversation, and which seem to me most likely to draw the attention and pervert the minds of young persons. And

of these objections several have been considered already.

I. THE number of unbelievers, who have appeared in this and other ages, and the learning and abilities of some of them, are, I find, stumbling-blocks to many. But let it be remembered, that a greater number might be specified of believers, still more distinguished for learning, candour, and penetration, than any infidels that can be named of this, or any other age. Nor let it be forgotten, that the founders of our religion foretold, that unbelievers of various kinds, and of considerable abilities, would arise: so that, if they had not arisen, several prophecies in

*Number
of
unbelievers*

the New Testament would not have been accomplished.

BUT passing this; and in order to give a more explicit answer to the objection; it may be proper to consider, what, from the declarations of our Lord himself, as well as from the nature of the thing, may be inferred concerning the character of those persons, who should be capable of becoming his disciples. For if it shall be found, that there are infidels who have not that character, and that infidels in general have it not, their unbelief is a proof of his wisdom and foreknowledge, and may consequently furnish an argument, not against his religion, but for it.

1. THE first thing necessary to qualify the human mind for receiving this, or indeed any other, doctrine, is attention. This our Lord repeatedly demanded : ‘ he that hath ears to hear, let him hear.’ The mighty works he performed, the wonderful things he spoke, the sanctity of his life, the benevolence of his manners, and the authority that accompanied his teaching, were sufficient, one would think, to have made all Syria attend, and did in fact raise the attention of many. And, though *we* see no miracles, as they did, nor hear the voice of the divine teacher, yet we see, we hear, and we read, concerning him, what is sufficient to make every one of us attend, who desires to know the truth and his duty.

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The existence, and long continuance, of this religion ; its singular nature and history ; and the learning, abilities, and virtues, of many of those who have believed, ought to satisfy every considerate mind, that there is something extraordinary in it, and that to be indifferent about it may be very dangerous.

2. BUT, secondly, in order to know “ the truth as it is in Jesus,” we must not only attend, but also inquire. Our Saviour often taught in parables. His hearers, if they had been suitably affected by his miracles and plainer doctrines, would have asked the meaning of those darker sayings : and when they did so, with a sincere desire of information,

mation, we find, that he always gave it. Them who expressed no curiosity, and made no inquiry, he permitted to remain in ignorance. Was this unreasonable? He came to *call* sinners to repentance, but not to *compel* them. Every circumstance considered, of his life and doctrine, his benevolence, his piety, his power, and his wisdom, (whereof the Jews could not be ignorant); did not this want of curiosity amount to a proof, that their hearts were, by prejudice and other bad habits, hardened against the love both of God and of man, as well as of the truth? And is it possible, that hearts of such a temper should voluntarily receive a religion, whereof piety and benevolence, or (to adopt the Scriptural

tural terms) godliness and charity, are essential principles ?

LET it be considered further, that, till our curiosity with respect to religion be so far raised, as to incline us to study the Scriptures, we cannot feel the force of some of the strongest proofs of their truth ; those particularly, as already hinted, that arise from their peculiar excellence, and from prophecy. And therefore he, who is disposed to cavil at religion, and will not give himself the trouble to study it, must necessarily remain ignorant and sceptical. Is there any thing strange in this ? Suppose a father to desire his son to study medicine ; and suppose that the son, from prejudices against it, or indifference

ence about it, will not attend, either to what his master says, or to the books he recommends, is it possible that he can ever become a physician, or get the better of his prejudices? Will the careless sceptick excuse himself by saying, 'I need not read the Bible: I know from Voltaire, and Hume, and Bolingbroke, what Christianity is?' Then let him be told, that every one of the persons mentioned, and every other infidel whose writings are extant, can be proved, from his own books, to have been grossly ignorant of Christianity. And let him be reminded further, that to acquiesce in that character of Jesus, or of any other person, which is given by the declared
and

and mortal enemy of that person, is no sign either of prudence or of candour.

BUT I have looked, he will perhaps say, into creeds and confessions, which are said to contain the very quintessence of Scripture; and they are not at all to my mind; and I suppose I should find Scripture itself as little so: why then should I read it? I answer, supposing those creeds and confessions unexceptionable, which all creeds and confessions are not; yet still they are abridgements, and to him who is not conversant in Scripture must appear *abstruse*, and hardly intelligible. And besides, recurring to an example already given, let me be permitted to say, that if any man were *very much*
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interested to know my character, and had the means of knowing it by conversing and living with me, he would, if he were either honest or wise, study myself, and not trust implicitly to what is said of me, either by my enemies, or by my friends. We are commanded to search the Scriptures, and told that in them we shall find evidence of their truth. If we have not done so, we know not what they are ; if we will not do so, we never can know it.

3. A third thing, necessary to prepare us for the reception of Christian faith, is, a lowly mind, free from prejudice, and willing to hear, and to learn. This our Lord often declares.

‘ Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall

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‘ not

‘not receive the kingdom of God as a
‘little child, shall in nowise enter
‘therein:’ the obvious meaning where-
of is, that if we do not attend to the
doctrines of the gospel, with the humi-
lity and teachableness of a young child,
it is impossible for us to believe them.
A young child is of all animals the
most unassuming and docile. He is
not inclined to cavil at the information
he may receive from an affectionate
father. And he is free from preju-
dice, and soon becomes sensible of his
own weakness, and of the need he has
of instruction. At least, if this is not
true of every child, it is certainly true
of many, and ought to be of all. When
with these dispositions men begin and
carry on their inquiries into Christian-
ity,

ity, they will not object to its doctrine, or be dissatisfied with its evidence ; but will adore the infinite goodness and condescension of the Deity, in treating them as his children, and permitting them to call him their Father. Is it too much, to require of Christians, this humility, candour, and exemption from prejudice ? It is no more than Newton requires of every one who would study philosophy : it is no more than every master requires of his apprentice.

BUT must the young Christian, during his noviciate, make no use of his reason ? has he nothing to do, but to listen, and believe ? He is commanded to use his reason in all cases, in which

a prudent father would encourage his child to use it; that is, in all cases whereof he is a competent judge: and, in all cases whatever, he must use his reason so far, as to admit nothing that contradicts it. But, as a father is sometimes obliged, and has an undoubted right, to require implicit faith from his children, and to tell them, that, till their faculties be more improved, they will not understand the reason of such and such a precept or doctrine; so our heavenly Father has an undoubted right to require of us a thankful acquiescence in dispensations of Providence which in this life we cannot understand, and assent to doctrines which may at present transcend our reason. Every day we see what we cannot account for, and
believe

believe what we do not distinctly comprehend. So that, if there were nothing of this kind in our religion, it would be like none of the other works of God that we are acquainted with, and would rather resemble the invention of a cautious man. But though the mysteries of Christianity may transcend human reason, not one of them contradicts it.

THAT there is a Mediator between God and man, cannot appear contrary to reason, or in any degree improbable, when we consider, that all the good things we receive, though the free gifts of God, come to us by the intervention of various agents and instruments.

—That the divine dispensations with respect

respect to the human race should comprehend a long train of effects and causes, and a long succession of years, will not seem extraordinary to those who have observed, as every considerate person must have done, that the growth of plants and animals, and all the other operations of nature, are progressive and gradual.—The incarnation is not to us more unintelligible, than the union of a human body with a human soul.—To atone voluntarily for the sin of others, may be as possible to a superior being, and in him may be as consonant to equity, as, among inferior beings, for one man gratuitously to pay another's debt.—That the grace of God should exert itself in supporting, cherishing, and sanctifying the
true

true believer, is as easily understood, as any other exertion of divine goodness.—And that there should be a resurrection of the body, is suitable to many analogies in nature, and particularly to that, alluded to by the apostle, of a new and flourishing vegetable rising from a buried and corrupted grain of corn.

WHILE one too anxiously endeavours to *explain* these, and some of the other mysterious doctrines of our religion, one may no doubt say unwarrantable things. But if we take them as they are delivered in Holy Writ, our only infallible standard of faith, we shall not find that they contain any thing, in which a man of the soundest
and

and fairest mind, who has studied the gospel and its evidences, may not without difficulty acquiesce.

4. THE last thing I shall mention, as a requisite to the profitable study of the New Testament, is a desire that it may be true. He, who has not this desire, must either be ignorant of Christianity, and consequently unfit to receive it; or must be indifferent both to the glory of God and to the good of mankind, and consequently averse to the reception of it. That our religion should be true, is, as I remarked already, the interest of all men, except of those hardened sinners who are determined not to repent: for to the penitent believer, who regrets the frailty of his nature, and
studies

studies to reform it, the gospel speaks nothing but peace, and pardon, and everlasting comfort.

THAT we readily believe what we wish to be true, has been often said, and is become proverbial. But belief of this sort *may be* as rational as any other. I see a stranger, whose countenance and manner please me, and I wish to find him as good as he is agreeable : I cultivate his acquaintance, and after long trial discover that he is every thing I would have him to be. Is this discovery the less to be depended on, for having been preceded, and partly occasioned, by a prepossession in his favour? And if at first sight

I had conceived a contrary prepossession, and always kept at a distance from him, and been unwilling to receive information concerning him, except from his enemies, should I not have persisted in my dislike, however unmerited on his part, and uncandid on mine? The former case is similar to that of those, who study Christianity because they love it : the latter resembles that of him who remains in unbelief, because he dislikes the gospel, or disregards it.

CONVICTION may be extorted by evidence, so as to rise necessarily in every rational mind to whom the evidence is presented. Such is that which
is

is enforced upon us by mathematical proof, or by the testimony of sense, or of memory. And in this kind of conviction there can be no more merit or demerit, than in seeing what is exposed to our view, or hearing what is sounded in our ear. Christian faith is not of this kind. In it the heart and affections are concerned, as well as the understanding. Our Lord pronounced no benediction on Thomas for having believed his sight and touch: ‘but, ‘Blessed, said he, are they who have ‘not seen, and yet have believed:’ that is, ‘who without such evidence of ‘sense (I quote Dr Clarke’s *Paraphrase*) shall, upon credible testimony, be willing to believe and embrace a doctrine which tends so
‘greatly

‘greatly to the glory of God, and the
 ‘salvation of men.’ The doubts of
 Thomas were on this extraordinary oc-
 casion removed by *irresistible evidence* :
 but it would not have suited the genius
 of a religion, framed for proving the
 virtue and purifying the nature of
 moral beings, that its evidences in gen-
 eral should have been such as either to
 compel assent, or infringe the freedom
 of obedience. They are indeed so
 powerful, that nothing but ignorance,
 or hardness of heart, can prevent their
 making a deep impression ; but their
 full effect is felt by those minds only,
 who, together with lowliness, docility,
 and candour, entertain a predilection
 for that gospel, which proclaims ‘Glo-
 ‘ry to God in the highest, peace on
 ‘earth,

‘earth, and goodwill towards men.’ In true Christian faith, therefore, there is virtue. It is indeed an assemblage of many virtues ; of piety, benevolence, humility, and the love of truth and of goodness. No wonder, then, that the apostle should have declared, ‘that without faith it is impossible to please God.’

BUT, ought we not in charity to believe, that there may be infidels of so good a heart as to love the doctrine, though they have the misfortune to be dissatisfied with the evidence, of the gospel ? Charity, no doubt, ‘which thinketh no evil,’ ought to make us believe that this is the case, wherever it is possible. But it is not possible, that
this

this can be the case of those, who labour to subvert the faith of others ; and who are so far from expressing regret at the discovery of any supposed defect in the evidence of Christianity, or seeming to think it a misfortune or a disappointment, that they rejoice in it, and triumph in that superiour penetration, which they fondly imagine has enabled them to make it.

AND now, if, as I have endeavoured to prove, it appears from the declarations of our Saviour himself, and from the nature of the human mind, that they only can believe his religion, who attend to it, and who study it with candour, humility, and a sincere desire to find it true ; is it wonderful, that those

those men should be unbelievers who write and speak against it, and show, by what they write and speak, that they do not understand, and have never studied it? Can that man with the gospel to be true, who employs his life in labouring to prove it false? Can he be said to have read it with attention, or to have read it at all, who, with Rousseau, declares our Lord's miracles a discredit to his religion, and cannot distinguish between them and the tricks of jugglers? Can they be thought to have studied it with humility and candour, who sneer at it, like Shaftesbury; who laugh at it, like Voltaire; or who treat it with contempt and insult, like the cool and insidious Hume, or the proud and presumptuous Bolingbroke?

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Had religion been suited to heads and hearts like these, to them I should have left the defence of it; for it would have been a very different thing indeed from what it is. Their rejection of it supplies, if I mistake not, a pretty strong argument for its truth, as well as for its excellency.

II. Not only the number, and the learning, of unbelievers, but even their virtue, has been pleaded, in their behalf; and as an argument to prove, that Christianity is unnecessary.

OF their virtue, I have not much to say; enough indeed has been said by themselves, and their admirers. But ostentation is neither virtue, nor a sign of

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virtue
as well
as
number
of those
who don't believe it

of it: and perhaps the world would not have judged less favourably of them, if they had been more modest on this head. In fact, some late compliments that have been paid both to their VIRTUE and to their WISDOM, are so ridiculously extravagant, that they would have passed for derision, if not for scurrility, if they had not come from those who are known to be devoted adherents of the party.

To examine, with any degree of minuteness, the infidel's claim to the approbation and gratitude of mankind, by an inquiry into the private character of individuals, would be a task equally invidious and disagreeable. I leave it, therefore, to their biographers;

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whose

whose labours, however, if we may be allowed to take *Rousseau's Confessions*, and *Voltaire's Memoirs of himself*, as a specimen of this sort of history, will not reflect great honour on either the infidel or his cause.

THERE are different sorts of infidels. Some not only reject our religion, but also write against it, and do what in them lies to make mankind reject it: others satisfy themselves with speaking of it occasionally in terms of dislike and scorn: and a third sort perhaps there may be, though they are not so frequently met with, who only disbelieve it, without seeking to make others disbelieve. These last are the objects of pity, rather than of blame: but
it

it may be worth their while to consider, whether their unbelief be the effect of candid inquiry, or of prejudice and wilful inattention.

THE active and more zealous infidel either is certain, that we shall not in a future life be called to an account for our conduct in the present, or is somewhat uncertain with respect to that matter. Now, though he were absolutely certain, that our existence ends at death, or that the gospel is not true, (which no human being ever was, or can be), yet his endeavours to make others think so would do no honour to his goodness of heart. For infidels must know, that they cannot demonstrate, either that the gospel is false, or that

that a future state is impossible; and they must also know (or they know very little) that to a sincere Christian nothing can give more exquisite distress, than to be perplexed with doubts concerning the truth of that religion which is the foundation of his dearest hopes. But if they be not themselves absolutely certain that there is no life to come, and yet labour to persuade others that there is none, their conduct must be imputed, not merely to want of benevolence, but to downright malignity.

For the language of such conduct is no other than this. Those people, who believe what we tell them, may, for any thing that we *certainly know* to the

con-

contrary, find themselves miserably mistaken after all : however, their admiration flatters our vanity ; and therefore we endeavour to make them think as we speak, be the consequences what they will. What sort of virtue is this ? Is it not that of the madman mentioned by Solomon, who ‘ casteth fire-brands, arrows, and death, and faith, ‘ am I not in sport ?’ Is it not that of a conceited theorist, who, in order to gratify his own beggarly ambition, tampers with the happiness of mankind, as if it were a thing of no value ?

‘ BUT you mistake the matter entirely,’ he will reply. ‘ I teach men ‘ to think freely, because I wish to rid
‘ the

‘ the world of superstition, which is
‘ worse than irreligion, or even than
‘ atheism :’—and then perhaps he will
run out into a detail of the enormities,
that superstition has prompted Christ-
ians to perpetrate.

WHETHER it or atheism be the
greater evil, is a point which, if pro-
secuted, would lead into a long and in-
tricate inquiry. The former arises
from false opinions concerning invis-
ible beings ; and as the forms of false-
hood are innumerable, those of super-
stition must be so too ; and to human
society some of these may be more det-
rimental, others less, and some per-
haps not at all. But, to shorten the
controversy, I shall admit, that in all
its

its forms superstition is a very bad thing ; and that he would deserve well of mankind, who should drive it out of the world. But who is the man, who is most likely to do this ? and what are the best means of doing it ? The answer is easy : Jesus Christ is the man, and his religion the means. Had it not been for the divine goodness manifested in him, we should at this day have been pagans, the most superstitious of human kind. Wherever his religion is preached in its purity, superstition vanishes, like the birds of night at the rising of the sun. And as long as the existence of beings superior to man is believed to be either probable or possible, the world, where it is not enlightened with the knowledge

ledge of the one living and true God, will always be, as it always has been, superstitiously afraid of them. By divesting the human race of all religion, if that were practicable, you might no doubt free them from superstition: even as, by training poor children to midnight robbery, you might in time get the better of those ideas of nocturnal goblins, that may have been impressed upon their infancy. But before either expedient be tried, it would not be amiss to inquire, whether the cure is not worse than the disease, and whether the disease might not be more effectually cured, by teaching the knowledge of truth, and the love of virtue. —In fact, with superstition, with hypocrisy, with uncharitable or wrong-headed

headed enthusiasm, and with all those other enormities, which infidels charge on Christianity, in order to vindicate their dislike of it, Christianity is no more chargeable, and has nothing more to do, than with house-breaking, gambling, blasphemy, atheism, or witchcraft. Of this they cannot be ignorant, if they know any thing at all of the matter : and of a religion, or of a person, whereof they know nothing, modesty requires, that they should say nothing ; candour at least requires, that they should say nothing abusive.

IN the ordinary affairs of life, when a man has been proved guilty of mistake or falsehood, it is expected, that he will make an acknowledgment to

those who may have been injured by it ; to the publick, if the publick have reason to complain, or to individuals, if they only have suffered by his temerity. At any rate, it is expected, that, if he should not have made an acknowledgment in form, he will for the future be more cautious, and not give additional offence, by repeating those falsehoods whereof he has been convicted. But if he do neither ; if he persevere in the same injurious conduct, and reiterate his former misrepresentations with as much confidence, as if, instead of having been confuted, they had never been answered, and were indeed unanswerable ; what should we think of such a man ? Should we extol him as a pattern of wisdom and virtue ?

virtue? Or should we not rather charge him with obstinacy and want of candour, such as an honest man would be ashamed of? Is it fair to examine by this rule the conduct of infidel writers? Or does the merit of having made books against religion raise them so high above all considerations of rectitude, as to justify in them what would go near to make other men infamous?

Now, it is certain, that some late infidel writers lived to see many, and perhaps most, of their misrepresentations and sophistries, fairly exposed, and confuted unanswerably. And what was the consequence? Did they acknowledge their errors, retract what they had falsely affirmed, correct their reasonings, or reform

reform their principles ? Did they express any concern for having violated truth, ridiculed the religion of their country, or insulted the common sense of mankind ? No such matter. They went on publishing and republishing what they had formerly published, with the same assurance, as if nothing ever had been said, or could be said, against it.

HITHERTO it does not appear, that we have any great reason to compliment these unbelievers upon their virtue. Wit and humour they may have, and eloquence, and polished manners, and learning : and all this the gambler and thief may have, as well as they, and in as great a degree. And

it is very much the interest of the thief and gambler, as well as infidel writer, that he possess these and the like accomplishments. For, by fixing the publick attention upon his outside, they make it the more easy for him to hide the dispositions that lurk within.

BUT why seek to depreciate the unbeliever's character by invidious comparisons? The comparisons are, in my opinion, fair, and not invidious: however I drop them. Admitting then his behaviour to be as decent and regular as his admirers would have us believe, yet what can we hence infer? Little more, I apprehend, than that he is attentive to his interest, and the friend of his own cause. If I were to settle in
France,

France, and wished to be popular there, would it be any great merit in me, to comply with the customs, obey the laws, and speak the language, of that country? Now, the enemies of Christ are, in more senses than one, strangers and sojourners in the Christian world. Its policy they did not contrive; its laws they did not make; its customs, and the general modes of thinking and speaking that prevail in it, they did not introduce. All this is as really the work of Christians, as the language and laws of France are the work of the French nation. And I presume it will be admitted, that, in the Christian commonwealth, the aliens compared with the citizens are still the minority, and but a small one. What then would the
unbe-

unbeliever gain, if in his manners, as well as opinions, he were to set himself in opposition to the people among whom he resides ? He would gain little popularity, and few profelytes ; nay, by thus explaining and exemplifying his principles in his practice, he would disgust many whom it is his ambition to please ; and make those consider him as a dangerous man, who now, from not rightly understanding his tenets, may look upon him as inoffensive, or at worst as only whimsical.

HE may, for example, with impunity laugh at the observance of the Sabbath ; or complain of it, which I have heard him do, as a grievous interruption to industry : but if he were to
force

force his servants and cattle to their customary work on that day, he would not be a gainer by his singularity. He may speak with contempt of those who baptised him : but were he publicly to abjure his baptism, or refuse to admit his children to that rite, his profaneness and obstinacy would not raise him in the publick esteem. He may in his books abuse the ministers of God's word, and call them, as he has often done, enthusiasts and hypocrites: but were he in the public street to insult them with this language, he would be pointed at as a madman, or a monster. He may, in a word, think as he pleases ; and, in some nations, he may print and publish what he pleases : but violent measures, and practices directly
opposite

opposite to those of the community in which he lives, would frustrate every scheme of the unbeliever. By good humour, a winning address, and such insinuation as may 'half show and half veil his deep intent,' he may work his way gradually into the hearts of men, and, in case of danger, secure an evasion for himself, saying, 'Am I not in sport?'—but all at once to throw off disguise, to make open war on Christianity, declaring those to be fools and knaves who believe it, and in the sight of all men to trample upon the laws of his country, whereof the institutions of Jesus form a very considerable part, would be equally ruinous to his cause and to himself.

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III. OBJECTIONS have been raised against our religion, from the obscurity of particular doctrines and passages. But these obscurities have by some writers been both multiplied and magnified far beyond the truth. Father Simon endeavours to prove, that Scripture cannot be understood without the traditions of an infallible church : and it is easy to see his motives for supporting that opinion. But in fact, the essentials of religion are intelligible to all capacities ; especially to all who have been in any degree improved by Scriptural knowledge : for, without this, I must again repeat, that neither Christianity, nor its evidences, can ever be rightly understood. And, that, in a thing so extraordinary as divine revelation,

ation, there should be, as observed already, some particulars, which in this imperfect state we cannot distinctly comprehend, it would surely be reasonable to expect; since we find, that in the other works of God there are innumerable appearances that surpass our comprehension. Nor less reasonable is it to suppose, that of an age and country so remote as that of the apostles, many customs and forms of speech, occasionally alluded to in their writings, may now be forgotten, or not perfectly intelligible.

IN books too, that existed fourteen hundred years before the invention of printing, it can be no matter of wonder, that, by the inaccuracy of transcribers,

ers, there may have been introduced variations, and even corruptions of the original text. Yet these must have been inconsiderable ; more so, perhaps, than those of any other antient writings. For first, the transcribers of the New Testament must have always engaged in their work with the idea that the book before them was sacred ; which would no doubt incline them to be as attentive as possible. Secondly, the mutual jealousy of the several sects of Christians, who all agreed in appealing to this book as the standard of faith, would make them examine with peculiar care those copies of it that might be circulated by adversaries, and be ready to expose any inaccuracy wherever it should appear. And thirdly, on
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comparing the several copies and manuscripts ; the many translations that have been made at different times, into different languages ; and the innumerable quotations from holy writ that are found in the Greek and Latin fathers, it appears that the sacred text must have been in all ages very much the same. Bentley, whose skill in this sort of learning will not be questioned, observes, that the New Testament has suffered less injury from the hand of time, than any profane author. Indeed there never was any profane author, in whose preservation and purity mankind were so deeply interested, as all the Christian world have been, for these seventeen hundred years, in ascertaining, and preserving

fering from corruption or change, the original records of Christianity.

As to the Old Testament, though it may have suffered more than the New, we have no reason to think it has suffered much. It was entrusted to a people, who, satisfied of its divine origin, were so religiously careful of it, as to number the words, and even the letters, contained in the several books; and who, being also divided into sects, would be watchful to detect every error in transcription, whether the effect of design or of inadvertence.

By the mutual jealousy of religious parties, where it does not degenerate into uncharitableness, several good purposes

poses may be answered. Being, as it were, spies on each other's conduct, they reciprocally stand in awe of each other : the natural effect of which is, to promote activity, vigilance, and emulation. And if we are at pains to cultivate that godliness, sobriety, and charity, which all Christians admit to be indispensable ; and if we inquire humbly into the truth, and pray for grace to discover it, which also they all acknowledge to be their duty ; it may be presumed, from the goodness of our Creator, and from the different degrees of understanding which he has been pleased to bestow on different men, that diversities of opinion in speculative matters will not be imputed to us. Hence let all parties learn moderation
and

and mutual forbearance. That man must have a strange turn of mind, who can bring himself to believe, that those Christians only can be saved, who think exactly as he does.

IN whatever way we employ ourselves in this world, it seems to be the intention of Providence that we shall have difficulties to encounter : for care, as Virgil observes, stimulates the soul, as inaction renders it lethargick. The cross accidents of life make invention, patience, and fortitude necessary, to prevent, to support, and to overcome them. Man, born ignorant, must labour in the acquisition of knowledge. His reason is weak, but it is improveable ; and, from a sense of its weakness,

ness, he feels the necessity of improving it, by free and fair inquiry into the nature of those things that exercise it. Obscurities in philosophy, by forcing us to attend and investigate, rouse the inventive powers, and strengthen both the understanding and the memory. And the obscurities of religion, far from being considerable enough to discourage inquiry, serve only to awaken the curiosity of the Christian ; disposing him to search the Scripture ; to examine his own mind ; to meditate on the nature, the providence, the word, and the works of God ; to be humble, in consideration of his ignorance and infirmity ; and to implore the aid of the Holy Spirit, to guide him into all necessary truth. Are these exercises

detrimental to human nature? Are they not in the highest degree beneficial? Let not then the obscurities of particular passages and doctrines be objected to the religion of the New Testament. When fairly stated, they will be found rather to add to its evidence. At least they prove it to be exactly similar to the other works of the same great and good Being, who, by the constitution of every thing here below, plainly shows, that our present state is a state of trial.

THESE remarks may suggest an answer to what has been objected to our religion by those, who wonder, that, after having been preached seventeen hundred years in the most enlightened parts

parts of the world, it should still need interpretation, and give scope to the labours of the critick, translator, and antiquary. To him, who has studied the analogies of nature, this can be no matter of wonder. In the other works of God we are continually making new discoveries ; without foreseeing any end to human research, or any period that promises complete gratification to human curiosity. This having been the case in all past ages, and all other sciences, we may reasonably conclude that it will be so in every age to come ; and that the contemplation of the divine goodness and wisdom, as displayed in the works of creation and providence, may furnish delightful employment, even for eternity. For an almighty Creator may
make

make his works of infinite extent, if he pleases ; and to a limited understanding the examination of that which is infinite can never come to an end.

EVERY day we have something to do ; if we had not, we should be miserable. Every art and science admits of improvement ; if it did not, the human mind would languish in idleness, human labour would no longer be amusing, and the spirit of enterprise, and the vicissitudes of hope and fear, would be no more ; a state of things equally inconsistent with the virtue and the happiness of such a creature as man. The essential doctrines of our religion, like the practical and most necessary parts of agriculture, medicine,
navi-

navigation, and other sciences, are within the reach of every mind, who is willing to be instructed. And yet, in our religion, as in the arts and sciences, there still is, and probably will continue to be, room for inquiry, and need of illustration: and he who humbly inquires, with a sincere desire to know the truth, and do good by explaining it, will ever have reason to rejoice in his labour, as contributing no less to his own happiness and virtue, than to that of mankind. To which let me add, with respect to those who employ themselves in illustrating theological truth, that, as long as men are liable to mistake, the penetration of one may be useful in correcting the inaccuracy of another.

4

IV. SOME are at a loss to reconcile the inspiration of the evangelists with those particulars wherein their gospels seem to differ from one another. They do not all record the same things, nor do they relate all the same events in the same manner. The differences are indeed minute ; but they are perceptible. How could this be, if the historians were inspired ? The following answer to this query is submitted to the reader.

SOCRATES long ago observed, that man has no need of supernatural information concerning those things which his natural faculties are alone sufficient to discover. To enable the apostles to comprehend all evangelical truth,

truth, supernatural light was necessary. Their Master accordingly promised it, and on the day of Pentecost, or soon after, they received it. I say, *or soon after*, because, subsequent to the descent of the Holy Spirit on that day, a particular revelation, relating to the conversion of the Gentiles, was made to Peter, and the whole scheme of the gospel, as well as its miraculous gifts and graces, communicated to Paul by immediate inspiration. After this we find, that in their *doctrine* they lay claim to infallibility in pretty strong terms. On some extraordinary emergencies too, in the course of their ministry, as in the case of their being arraigned before kings and rulers, it was promised, that they should receive
aid

aid from heaven in making their defence.

BUT inspiration was not necessary to enable them to see and hear ; or to teach them how to conduct themselves in the common business of life. After their conversion, we have no reason to think, that John was a more expert fisherman, or Luke a more skilful physician, than before. As historians, therefore, they need not, I presume, be considered in any other light, than that of honest men, recording what they saw and heard, and had examined, and were competent judges of, and deeply interested in : for, on this supposition, their testimony is fully sufficient to establish the truth of the gospel.

pel. And this may account for their not all recording the same things, nor describing the same events in exactly the same way.

If John, for example, saw his Master do, or heard him say, what Matthew did not see or hear, which might have happened in a hundred instances, it was equally natural, for the former to record, and for the latter not to record it. And if Matthew and Mark, supposed to have been spectators of the crucifixion, were so stationed in the croud, as to hear the one robber revile their dying Lord, and to see the other move his lips, but without hearing what he said, it was not unnatural for them to conclude, as the combina-

tion against him seemed now to be universal, that both the robbers reviled him ; which yet Luke, or some other person from whom Luke received his information, might, by being more advantageously situated, and hearing the words of the penitent robber, know to be true of only one of them. At any rate, we may with confidence affirm, that if the evangelists had been to invent a fable, and obtrude it on the world for truth, they would have taken care that there should be no such contrariety in their testimonies, as there confessedly is in this instance : which, however, is not so important, as either to detract from the veracity of the historians, or throw any blemish on the purity of the gospel.

THE

THE same thing may be said of our Lord's genealogy, as it is differently stated by Matthew and Luke. If either account had been false, both would not have existed. Both therefore are true; and may be reconciled, by supposing the one to be the genealogy of his mother, and the other that of his reputed father. In the most material articles they agree; namely, that he was descended from Abraham, and of the family of David. And it is impossible to imagine any motive, that could induce either Luke or Matthew to misrepresent the subsequent articles; as among a people, so curious in genealogy as the Jews were, the error might be so easily found out.

WHEN

WHEN the matter inquired into is very complex, an exact coincidence in the testimony of witnesses is not expected. Let them be ever so attentive and candid, they could not have stood all in the same place, nor consequently have taken notice of the very same particulars without variation. Of some sorts of facts, too, the memory of some men is more tenacious than that of others. One remembers best what he saw, another what he heard : one attends to the connection of events with their effects and causes ; another rather considers them separately, and as each event is in itself. Hence, as formerly observed, some diversities in what they declare, concerning circumstances of little moment, would convey a favourable

ourable opinion of the veracity of witnesses: whereas a perfect sameness of declaration might, in the case supposed, breed suspicion of a preconcerted plan.

BUT though, after the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the apostles laid claim to infallibility of doctrine, they never gave out, that their *whole conduct* was under the guidance of inspiration. They were indeed holy men; but still they were men; and, as such, liable both to *sins* of infirmity, which they humbly acknowledge, and from which they affirm that no man is free, and also to error, not in doctrine indeed, but in those matters of less moment, in which they had nothing but their own reason to direct them.

them. ' If we have no sin, says St
' John, we deceive ourselves, and the
' truth is not in us.' We are men of
' like passions with you,' said Paul and
Barnabas, when the people of Lystra
were preparing to pay them divine hon-
ours. And here, let me ask in passing,
whether these two apostles, if they
had been impostors, or wished to gain
undue influence over the minds of men,
would have been so zealous in refusing
those honours, and so anxious to con-
vert that people from idolatry. And
let me ask further, with respect to the
apostles in general, whether, if ambi-
tion, or vanity, or any other principle
than the love of truth, had been the
motive of their conduct, they would so
uniformly, and with such solemnity of
pro-

protestation, have ascribed all the glory of their miracles and doctrine, not to themselves, but to their crucified Lord.

AND now, if I have rightly stated the nature of their inspiration, can it appear strange, or in any respect derogatory from the character of the apostles and evangelists, that Paul and Barnabas should differ in opinion, concerning the propriety of taking John surnamed Mark along with them : that this John should have been suspected of a temporary neglect of duty * : that Peter and Paul, though men of distinguished fortitude, should on one or two

* Acts xv. 37.—40.

two occasions have been seized with a momentary fit of fear; or that the former apostle should have been re-proved by the latter, for an inconsistency of conduct, owing to his having been, in one particular case, too indulgent to certain prejudices of his Jewish countrymen *:—a principle very natural in itself, especially to, a warm-hearted affectionate man like Peter, and in ordinary cases not very blameable? All this might have appeared strange, if the apostles had ever pretended that their conduct was as blameless as their doctrine. But they modestly declared it was not. Does this invalidate their testimony? Does it not, on the
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* Galat. ii. 11.

contrary, honour to their candour, and prove them to have been equally incapable of deceit and of ostentation ?

V. CHRISTIANITY, it has been said, is a religion so ill adapted to this world, that it is impossible to live here, as people must do, and yet comply with the strictness of its morality. I admit, that human affairs are too often conducted on principles very different from those of Jesus ; that the man who sets his affections on this world, and resolves to act accordingly, will not find encouragement in the gospel ; and that to the voluptuous, the ignorant, and the thoughtless part of mankind, the behaviour of a sincere Christian may sometimes appear not a little sin-

gular. Nor can this seem wonderful to those who consider, that our Lord came into the world, to teach men, not how to become rich, renowned, or great, but how to prepare themselves for eternity. But though the principles of Christian and of worldly policy are too often inconsistent, it does not follow, that they are necessarily so, or that they ought to be so. Human affairs, conducted on Christian principles, would transform this world, which, notwithstanding all that human laws can do, is a very confused scene, into an elysium of righteousness and peace.

OUR religion prohibits all injustice, contention, covetousness, pride, revenge, turbulence, hatred, and discontent ;
and

and all pleasures, passions, and purposes, that tend to debase the soul, or molest our neighbour. It enjoins compassion, liberality, and faithfulness; and declares, that no other virtue can make amends for the want of that benevolence or charity, ‘ which suffereth
 ‘ long and is kind, envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth
 ‘ not behave itself unseemly, seeketh
 ‘ not its own, is not easily provoked,
 ‘ thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth *.’
 What is there in this charity, that tends to interrupt the business or innocent comforts of life, or the prosperity of nations? The injurious man, and the sensual,

* 1 Cor. xiii.

ensual, the proud, the covetous, and the hard-hearted, may object to the morality of the gospel, as the cheat and robber may to the laws of the land, as unreasonably severe : but the just, the intelligent, the good-natured, and the sober-minded, will ever be of a different opinion. Those devout and generous affections, that continually prevail in the breast of a true Christian, are in themselves exquisitely delightful ; and, instead of lessening other innocent pleasures, cannot fail to increase, ennoble, and refine them.

THE gospel, say some, does no where recommend patriotism, or the love of our country ; that sublime virtue, so
highly

highly celebrated by the Greeks and Romans, which gives elevation to the human soul, and has produced so many great characters and gallant deeds.— It is true, that a Christian's principles make him a citizen of the world; by declaring it to be his duty to wish well, and, as he has opportunity, to good to all men, whatever be their religion, or country. And it is also true, that patriotism, when it divests a man of Christian benevolence, and makes him indifferent to the welfare of the stranger and the alien, ceases to be a virtue, and becomes a surly, savage, and selfish thing. What should we think of the clown, who would refuse to take concern in human affairs, except within the precincts of his own parish? In the

the eye of the Christian philosopher, that person is equally censurable, for his narrow views and want of humanity, who is interested for his own country only, or who, in order to raise it, would pull others down. Patriotism is partly a selfish, and partly a generous principle. Whatever is selfish in it Christianity discountenances ; whatever is generous it recommends.

A PARTIALITY in favour of those who depend on us, who are related to us by blood or by friendship, and who worship the same God and Saviour whom we worship, as it is natural to man, is also suitable to the spirit of the gospel. Our Lord commanded his apostles to make the first offers of salvation

vation to their countrymen the Jews : and he himself, foreseeing the ruin of his country, addressed Jerusalem in the most pathetick strains of affection, and wept over it. ‘ If any provide not for ‘ his own,’ says the apostle, ‘ especially ‘ for those of his own house, he hath ‘ denied the faith, and is worse than an ‘ infidel.’ ‘ As we have opportunity,’ says he in another place, ‘ let us do ‘ good unto all men, especially unto ‘ them that are of the household of ‘ faith.’

OUR Saviour graciously forbids excessive anxiety * with regard to the events

* Mat. vi. 25.—34. That phrase in our version, *take no thought*, does not now give the meaning

events of life, and the good things of this world : but his religion, as well as that of Moses, is most unfriendly to indolence ; and his apostles recommended industry, both by precept, and by example. Nay, there is reason to think that he himself had laboured with his own hands in his reputed father's profession : for otherwise his townsmen would not have called him the carpenter. He prohibits revenge and contention, but not self-defence ; and

meaning of the Greek term. But, as an apology for the translators, it may be observed, that, in the English of their time, *thought* was sometimes used to express great anxiety, or solicitude. Bacon, in his history of Henry VII. speaks of a man, who *died with thought and anguish*.

and this no lawgiver ever found it necessary to enjoin, as the instincts of our nature, and the well-being of society, render it indispensable. And though, with respect to injury, the first disciples were commanded to be passive ; as we all are, to forbear, and forgive : yet he allowed them to speak in their own vindication, and even promised supernatural aid, when they should be obliged to do so.

WAR cannot suit the genius of a religion, whose end is peace : but what then ? If wars were to cease throughout the world, would society be less comfortable than it is, or any nation less flourishing ? All mankind speak of war as a calamity. But war, it will

be urged, is unavoidable. Perhaps it may be so : and when it is, that religion surely cannot be said to forbid it, which permits self-defence, and enjoins submission to government. There is no opposition between the character of a good Christian and that of a valiant soldier. Military merit is celebrated with high encomiums in the Old Testament. In the New, soldiers are often spoken of with honour, and several devout ones are particularly mentioned. Our Lord praised the faith of the centurion whose servant he healed ; intimating that he was in the way of salvation. When the centurion Cornelius was baptised by Peter, he was neither blamed for having followed that employment, nor desired to relinquish it.

it. The advice given by John the Baptist to the soldiers was (not to throw away their arms, and cultivate the arts of peace, but) to be inoffensive in their behaviour, and content with their wages. And when the Ephesians are desired to 'take unto them the whole 'armour of God, the breast-plate of 'righteousness, the shield of faith, the 'helmet of salvation, and the sword of 'the spirit,' these, with many other scriptural allusions of a like nature, are honourable to the military profession. In fact, there are few professions in life, that may give scope to so many Christian virtues. In him who merits the character of a good soldier, we expect to find modesty, moderation, gentleness, patience, clemency, and simple manners ;

manners ; and they, who have been much in the world, must have met with many instances to warrant this expectation.

BUT friendship, the source of so many comforts, and without which life would soon become a burden, is nowhere mentioned in the New Testament as a Christian virtue. This has by some been thought an objection to the morality of the gospel, as well as a proof of its unsuitableness to the general tenor of human affairs. But Shaftesbury, who I think was the first that started this cavil, might have been asked, from which of his admired antients he had learned, that friendship is a virtue? Cicero, who wrote an elegant book

book on the subject, would not have taught him so : for between friendship and virtue he distinguishes, when he says, in the conclusion of the book, that virtue is more excellent than friendship, and that it is virtue which makes friendship, and preserves it. Nor is Aristotle positive on this head ; tho' he owns that friendship and virtue are connected. And so indeed they are ; as the one may give occasion to the other ; even as partnership in trade may give rise to fidelity and industry, or fidelity and industry to a bond of partnership. But though fidelity and industry are virtues, partnership is not a virtue ; nor is any trader praised for having partners, or blamed for not having them. And to be without friends,

friends, when it is owing to no misconduct of ours, is a very great misfortune indeed ; but no rational being ever thought of calling it a fault. All the *virtues* comprehended in friendship, all the *duties* that one friend owes another, are in Scripture enjoined by precept, and set in the most engaging light by example. Wherein, then, is Scripture deficient with respect to friendship ? In this only, that it contains no such precept as the following :
 ‘ And thou shalt make choice of a certain person, or of certain persons, because he is, or they are, agreeable to thee ; and thou shalt love him, or them, more than others ; and thou shalt, moreover, make him or them love thee in like manner.’ Would
 not

not this be charming legislation? Would it not prove the lawgiver to be profoundly skilled in the nature of man, and of human affairs? Yet such, in the case before us, seems to have been the skill, and such the penetration, of the author of *Characteristicks*.

IN a word ; if temperance, piety, and social love ; if meekness, integrity, and mercy ; if a disposition to be quiet and mind our own business ; if to abstain from evil, and suppress every injurious purpose, be beneficial to man, and tend both to private and to publick good ; it follows, that our religion is, even for this world, the best policy ; and that the disorders we see around us are owing, not to Christianity, but to
the

the prevalence of unchristian practice, and antichristian principles. So that to think of improving human affairs by taking off the restraints of Christian morality, is not less absurd, than to propose to improve commerce by a repeal of the laws that prohibit forgery and theft.

6 VI. BUT is not the world as wicked now, as it was in the days of paganism? And did not antient times produce as great men, as any of those who have distinguished themselves in these latter ages? What mighty benefit, then, in respect either of manners or of policy, have mankind derived from the Christian religion?

THOUGH

THOUGH the two former questions were to be answered in the affirmative, it would not weaken the evidence of the gospel. The first preachers of it never said, that the great ends proposed by it would be accomplished immediately, or even soon; or that every one 'who should name the name of Christ *would* depart from iniquity.' On the contrary, they spoke so often, and so particularly, of the corruption of latter ages, that we cannot doubt of their having foreseen it. If even of the twelve, who were chosen by our Lord himself, 'one was a devil,' of what other Christian society could it be expected, that all the members would 'adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things?' As long as

we are in a state of trial, there must be evils, both physical and moral, to exercise our virtue; as long as we are fallible, our virtue must be tainted with imperfection, and our knowledge with error; and, as long as repentance and faith are Christian duties, man will be a sinful creature, and exposed to various temptations, from the example of the wicked, the corruption of his own heart, and the sophistry of the unbeliever. Every thing in our religion has a reference to a future life. Of its importance, therefore, to the virtue and happiness of mankind, it is not possible for us to be competent judges, till hereafter our faith be lost in vision, our trial at an end, and our minds expanded so as to take in the whole extent

tent of this wonderful dispensation, in all its tendencies and consequences.

MEANWHILE, however, we know enough both of Christianity and of human nature, to see that mankind are in many respects improved by the religion of Jesus. To state an exact comparison between Christian and pagan manners, is indeed impossible. We are not ignorant of the vices of our own times : but who will pretend to compute the probable amount of Christian virtue ; whereof it is the character, rather to shrink from public view, than display itself to the world ? And of the crimes and virtues of the heathen we know little but what
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is recorded in their histories, or alluded to in their other writings.

I. WITH respect to the matter now before us, the first question ought to be stated thus : Whether we have not reason to think, that mankind are upon the whole wiser and happier than they would have been, if the Holy Scriptures had never existed. Let him who is at a loss for an answer compare the theology, and the morality, of Christ and Moses, with that of those nations, who never had any opportunity of deriving knowledge from those great sources of wisdom, the Old and New Testaments.

WE must with shame and sorrow confess, that many who are called
Christ.

Christians are a disgrace to their religion ; nay, I am afraid, that one might without breach of charity admit, that many of them are as desperately wicked, as any barbarian or pagan that can be named. But this cannot be imputed to a religion, which they neither obey nor believe, nor wish to understand ; to a religion, that denounces ‘ tribulation and anguish upon ‘ every soul of man who does evil,’ and promises ‘ glory, honour, and ‘ peace, to every man that worketh ‘ good.’ Because the best things may be abused or despised by those who are unworthy of them, does it follow, that the best things are evil or insignificant ? Or, if a man’s appetite were so depraved as to feed on nothing but
 noxious

noxious weeds, would that be any objection to the usefulness of corn, or of agriculture ?

OF those who worship the living and true God, is not the condition preferable to that of him, who trembles before the shrine of devils, and idols, of stocks, stones, and vegetables, of brutes, monsters, and vermin ? In this respect, is not the superiority of the Christian over the pagan almost, if not altogether, as great, as that of a man over a beast ? And let it never be forgotten, that if it had not been for Jesus Christ and Moses, and the divine goodness manifested in them, the whole world would at this day have been barbarous, or pagan, or both, and likely
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to continue so as long as there were men upon the earth.

IN this argument it is not necessary to advert to the condition of savages, cannibals, and the worst sort of barbarians. He who can look upon such misery without compassion and horror, or without a due sense of the blessings derived from Christianity and civilized manners, must be equally destitute of humanity and of reason. But may not the wisdom and virtue of the antient Greeks and Romans, in their most civilized state, bear a comparison with the manners and literature of the Christian world?

IN

IN some respects they may, in others they cannot. For example, it will not be pretended, that, in any Christian country, a father may either adopt his new-born infant, (if I may use the expression), or abandon it to famine and beasts of prey ;—that the massacre of slaves is part of a funeral solemnity in honour of great men deceased ;—that horrid obscenities form any part of religious worship ;—that the most unnatural crimes are not only practised without shame, but celebrated by poets, and coolly mentioned as customary things, even by the gravest writers ;—that, to gratify an ambitious profligate, inoffensive nations are invaded, enslaved, or exterminated ;—that, for the amusement of a few young foldiers,

two or three thousand poor unarmed and innocent men may be murdered in one night, with the connivance, nay and by the authority, of the law;—that the most worthless tyrants are flattered with divine honours when alive, and worshipped as Gods when dead;—that prisoners of war are enslaved, or impaled, or crucified, for having fought in defence of their country, and in obedience to their lawful rulers;—that captive kings and nations are publicly insulted by their conquerors, in those barbarous solemnities which of old were called triumphs;—that men are trained up for the purpose of cutting one another to pieces, by thousands and ten thousands in a month *, for

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* Lipsius affirms, (Sat. B. 1. C. 12.) that
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the diversion of the publick ;—that, as the father of gods and men, a king of Crete is worshipped, whom even his worshippers believe to have been guilty of innumerable crimes of the most infamous nature ; while, among the other objects of divine worship are to be reckoned thieves, drunkards, harlots, ruffians ; to say nothing of those underling idols, whose functions and attributes it is not decent even to name. —They, who are ever so little acquainted with antient Greece and Rome, know that I allude, not to the depravities

the gladiatorial shows sometimes cost Europe twenty or thirty thousand lives in a month ; and that not only the men, but even the women, of all ranks, were passionately fond of these shows. See Bishop Porteus, Sermon xiii.

ties of individuals only, but to the avowed opinions, and fashionable practice, of those celebrated nations. Surely, modern manners, censurable as we confess them to be in so many respects, are regulated, in the Christian world, by principles very different. And were they in all respects regulated, as they ought to be, by the pure principles of the gospel, we need not hesitate to affirm, that the virtue of Christians would as far transcend that of the Greeks and Romans, as the arts and literature of England surpass those of New Zealand or the land of Hottentots.

THIS affirmation is warranted by what we see of the influence of the
gospel

gospel among those who believe and obey it; whose numbers, though far short of what they ought to be, are by no means inconsiderable. And it is still further warranted by what we know of the first Christians; to whom the gospel was preached in its primitive simplicity; who believed it with full assurance of faith; and whose manners were accordingly pure and perfect to a degree, which, as an elegant author observes, it is almost as difficult for us to conceive as to imitate.

AND is it not infinitely to the honour of our religion, that the more firmly it is believed, and the less it is corrupted by human invention, the more powerful it is in improving and purifying the human soul? Does not this
show

show it to be something superiour to all human contrivance? Does not this prove, how wisely it is adapted to its end, namely, to the purpose of renewing our nature, and raising it again to that felicity which was forfeited by the fall? Is this either the end, or the tendency, of any other religion, or of any other system of opinions, that ever appeared in the world?

WHEN, a few centuries after the apostolick age, partly by the craft of man, and partly by circumstances peculiar to times of ignorance and trouble, this religion came to be almost effaced by superstition, it then lost its sanctifying influence; and furious passions, unjustifiable wars, and horrid massacres, disgraced Europe. Was this owing to
Christ.

Christianity? No; it was owing to the want of it. But the revival of learning hastened forward the Reformation, as the Reformation promoted the advancement of learning; the Scripture was studied, and Christianity was again understood. And though its influence is still unhappily counteracted by various causes; by the malignity of the infidel, by the blind zeal of the enthusiast, by the errors of human policy, and by the lamentable depravity of the human heart; yet has it diffused through the most enlightened nations a generosity and gentleness of manners unknown to paganism; and, in particular, co-operated with some other causes in transforming war, that necessary evil, into a system of hostility, which,

which, compared with the rancour and ravage of former wars, may almost be called, in the language of Milton, ‘ a civil game.’

WHEN modern infidels object to our religion, that it has been the cause of massacre and persecution, it is enough for the believer, after stating the fact just now mentioned, to refer them to the New Testament ; and desire them, if they can, to produce from it a single passage, that gives countenance to persecution or massacre. If they can find none ; if, on the contrary, it be found, that our Saviour and his apostles invariably recommend, and by the most awful sanctions enjoin, compassion, justice, forbearance, forgiveness, meekness,

ness, mercy, and charity, declaring, that without these virtues men are not Christians, be their professions what they will; surely candour ought to incline the adversary to impute the evils complained of, not to our religion, but to the depravity or folly of those wretched men, who have corrupted or disguised it by unwarrantable additions and misrepresentations; or who, knowing the power of religion over the human heart, have made use of its venerable name for the more effectual accomplishment of their own ambitious, sensual, or sanguinary purposes*. Is the physician's prescription to be blamed, because they who administered,

or

* See Bishop Porteus, Sermon xii.

or who swallowed, the draught, have thought proper to mix it with noxious ingredients of their own contrivance? Or, while all our senses bear testimony to its purity, is the fountain to be undervalued, because men may have been so unwise, or so wicked, as to pollute the stream? As long as we have the means of knowing the genuine doctrine of the gospel, that is, as long as the New Testament remains, it is not less repugnant to every idea of justice or candour to impute to Christianity the evil deeds of those who profess it, than it would be to upbraid a pious and prudent father with the disobedience of a profligate son, or to arraign a good sovereign for the crimes of a rebellious subject.

2. WHAT the second objection states, concerning the great men of pagan antiquity, I am not solicitous to controvert. The abilities displayed by some of those commanders, orators, historians, poets, statuaries, and architects, were, I confess, very great ; and, perhaps, have not been excelled or equalled since their time. But this affects not the present argument. A Christian may be a great man, and his religion will in many cases help to make him truly so : but Christ and his apostles taught, and suffered, and died, not to make men renowned in this world, but to raise them to glory, honour, and immortality, in that which is to come. The persons, on whom he pronounced benediction, were, not the learned,

learned, the ingenious, or the mighty, but the poor in spirit, the pure in heart, the meek, the merciful, the penitent, and the lovers of righteousness and peace. To the heathen moralist and his disciple, whose views did not reach beyond the present life, it might be a very interesting matter to know, by what means a man may so distinguish himself as to be admired by his fellow-citizens : but to the Christian, whose supreme concern it is to please God, and whose views extend forward to eternity, this is but a trivial consideration.

VII. By some well-meaning but weak minds, and by some of a different character, who were vain of their philosophy,

philosophy, the apparent insignificance of the human race may have been thought to lessen the credibility of the Christian religion. Compared to the extent of our solar system this earth is but a point ; and the solar system itself, compared to the universe, may be little more. How then, say they, is it possible to imagine, that such creatures as we are can be of so great importance, as that the Deity should send his Son, accompanied with so many displays of divine power, into this little world, to instruct us by his doctrine and example, and die on a cross to accomplish our salvation !

THIS is indeed an astonishing proof of the goodness of the great Creator,
and

and of the condescension of that glorious Person, who, for our sake, willingly submitted to such debasement. But the infinite goodness and power of God, though surpassing all comprehension, cannot exceed the belief of those who know, that he, in order to communicate felicity, created this boundless universe, with all the varieties of being it contains ; whom he continually supports and governs, and with every individual of whom he is continually present. The object may be too vast for any intelligence that is short of infinite : but to Him who sees all things, and can do all things, who had no beginning, and can have no end, all this must be easy ; incomparably easier indeed, than it is for a
father

father to take care of his child, or for a generous friend to relieve his indigent neighbour. God's dispensations with respect to man may reasonably enough overwhelm us with gratitude and adoration, and with a most humiliating sense of our own unworthiness; but let us take care that they do not raise within us an evil spirit of unbelief: which they will not do, unless we have the inexcusable temerity to judge of him by ourselves; and to infer, because our goodness is nothing, that his cannot be perfect; and, because we are ignorant and weak, that he cannot be omniscient and almighty. Far less absurd would it be, for the unlettered peasant to deny the possibility of calculating eclipses; for the blind
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to believe, that, because they cannot see, there is none else who can ; and for the poor to conclude, because they cannot relieve themselves, that it is not in the power of generosity to relieve them.

GREAT extent is a thing so striking to our imagination, that sometimes, in the moment of forgetfulness, we are apt to think nothing can be important but what is of vast corporeal magnitude. And yet, even to our apprehension, when we are willing to be rational, how much more sublime and more interesting an object is a mind like that of Newton, than the unwieldy force and brutal stupidity of such a monster as the poets describe Polyphemus ? Who, that had
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it in his power, would scruple to destroy a whale, in order to preserve a child? Nay, when compared with the happiness of one immortal mind, the greatest imaginable accumulation of inanimate substance must appear an insignificant thing. ‘If we consider, says Bentley, the dignity of an intelligent being, and put that in the scale against brute and inanimate matter, we may affirm, without overvaluing human nature, that the soul of one virtuous man is of greater worth and excellency, than the sun and his planets, and all the stars in the world.’ Let us not then make bulk the standard of value; or judge of the importance of man from the weight of his body, or
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from the size or situation of the planet that is now his place of abode.

OUR Saviour, as if to obviate objections of this nature, expresses most emphatically the superintending care of Providence, when he teaches, that it is God who adorns the grass of the field, that without him a sparrow falls not on the ground, and that even the hairs of our head are numbered. Yet this is no exaggeration; but must, if God is omniscient and almighty, be literally true. By a stupendous exuberance of animal, vegetable, and mineral production, and by an apparatus still more stupendous (if that were possible) for the distribution of light and heat, he supplies the means of life and comfort

to the short-lived inhabitants of this globe. Can it then appear incredible; nay, does not this consideration render it in the highest degree probable, that he has also prepared the means of eternal happiness for beings, whom he has formed for eternal duration, whom he has endowed with faculties so noble as those of the human soul, and for whose accommodation chiefly, during their present state of trial, he has provided all the magnificence of this sublunary world?

As far as our knowledge of nature extends, there is a wonderful suberviency of one thing to another. By means of comets it is probable, and by means of attraction it is possible, that
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our solar system may be connected with other solar systems. Our primary and secondary planets, all dependent on the great central orb, reciprocally transmit their influences ; whereby our atmosphere is variously affected, and prepared for yielding nourishment to the innumerable tribes of animal and vegetable nature that surround us : and from man to the most diminutive insect, and from the oak and cedar to the smallest organised body the microscope can discover, every individual being is not only complete in itself, consisting of parts mutually adapted, and operating to their respective ends, but is also subservient to the necessities of we know not how many other animal and vegetable species.—In unseen worlds is
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it not probable, that similar analogies may take place ?

IN this our first period of existence, our eye cannot penetrate beyond the present scene, and the human race appears one great and separate community : but with other worlds, and other communities, we probably may, and every argument for the truth of our religion gives us reason to think that we shall, be connected hereafter. And if by our behaviour we may, even while here, as our Lord positively affirms, heighten in some degree the felicity of angels, our salvation may hereafter be a matter of importance, not to us only, but to many other orders of immortal beings. They, it is true,

true, will not suffer for our guilt, nor be rewarded for our obedience. But it is not absurd to imagine, that our fall and recovery may be useful to them as an example ; and that the divine grace manifested in our redemption may raise their adoration and gratitude into higher raptures, and quicken their ardour to inquire, with ever new delight, into the dispensations of infinite wisdom. This is not mere conjecture. It derives plausibility from many analogies in nature ; as well as from Holy Writ, which represents the mystery of our redemption as an object of curiosity to superiour beings, and our repentance as an occasion of their joy.

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THAT mankind should, in every part of their duration, remain a separate community, and unconnected with all the rest of the universe, would be a very extravagant conceit. Yet, even on this supposition, they would not lose their importance; and the religion of our Saviour, considered as the means of eternal happiness to millions of the human race, will appear a work of such benignity, as could only proceed from the best of beings, and of such magnitude, as to be worthy of the greatest.

IT is a strange perversion of science, when men contract their views in the same proportion in which their knowledge of nature is extended. Yet this must

must be the case of those, who think it easier to divine power to make and preserve one world, than to create and govern ten thousand worlds. If we judge of the divine power from what we know of our own, both are impossible. And to divine power, supposed to be infinitely superiour to ours, both are not only possible, but easy, and equally so. The time was, when this globe was believed to be the universe ; and the sun, moon, and stars, to have been framed for no other purpose, but to enlighten and adorn this our habitation. If he who entertains this opinion find no difficulty in conceiving it possible for the Deity to superintend terrestrial things, and to prepare the means of happiness, both here and

and hereafter, for man, to whose dominion they are all subjected; why should it be more difficult for the enlightened astronomer to conceive, that the Creator of all worlds is equally powerful to preserve, and equally attentive to provide for, the innumerable works of his hand! Every new discovery in the visible universe ought to give elevation, and a new impulse, to the pious affections: and the further we see that the works of God extend, the more let us be overwhelmed with devout astonishment, in the contemplation of his infinite, eternal, and universal Being.

PARADOXICAL writers have flattered themselves, that infidelity would gain
ground

ground as philosophy advances. So sanguine, as I have been informed, was a late projector in this way, that he would sometimes give it as his opinion, that Christianity could not outlast the present century. I wish he had lived to see his mistake. By sophistry the faith of individuals may be unsettled; but that of nations is not so easily shaken: and sophistry never prevails long in opposition to common sense. From true philosophy, and a right use of reason, our religion has nothing to apprehend. The more carefully and candidly it is studied, the more conspicuous will its truth and beauty appear. Wherever it and human nature are understood, they are found so admirably suited to each other, that the

believer needs not fear, and it is vain for the adversary to wish, their final separation. God has joined them, and it is not in man's power to put them afunder. This hope, from considering the character of man, and the genius of the gospel, we should have had reason to rejoice in, even though the highest authority had not assured us, that against the church of Christ not even the gates of hell shall prevail.

THE stomach must be depraved, that transforms aliment into poison; and the eye cannot be sound, which daylight dazzles into blindness. Nor less unsound, or less depraved, is that understanding, which perverts science into unbelief, and becomes ignorant of

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God in proportion as the world is enlightened with the knowledge of his works. Minute cavillers may grow more sceptical, the greater dexterity they acquire in misrepresenting facts, and misapplying language. But I know not whether a single instance can be mentioned of a truly philosophick mind, who both understood Christianity, and disbelieved it.

T H E E N D.

